

Practical Skills for the Every Day

In terms of emergency preparedness, having tangible items like water, first-aid kits and extra batteries are essential, but there are intangible things that can be equally valuable.

[Practical skills](#) are basic, do-it-yourself skills that can keep you healthy and safe in a disaster or medical emergency.

Handwashing

Learn [the right way to wash your hands](#). Hand washing is one of the best ways to protect yourself, your family, and others from getting sick.

Effective handwashing involves 5 simple and effective steps:

- **Wet** your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.
- **Lather** your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to get the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- **Scrub** your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the “Happy Birthday” song twice.
- **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water.
- **Dry** your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)

You don’t need a special certification or formal training to [perform CPR](#), but you do need education. If cardiac arrest happens to someone near you, don’t be afraid—just be prepared! Follow these steps if you see someone in cardiac arrest:

- **Call 9-1-1 right away.** If another bystander is nearby, save time by asking that person to call 9-1-1 and look for an automated external defibrillator (AED) while you begin CPR. AEDs are portable machines that can electrically shock the heart and cause it to start beating again.
- **Give CPR.** Push down hard and fast in the center of the chest at a rate of 100 to 120 pushes a minute. Let the chest come back up to its normal position after each push. The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends timing your pushes to the beat of the song “Stayin’ Alive.” This method of CPR is called “hands-only” and does not involve breathing into the person’s mouth.
- **Continue giving CPR** until medical professionals arrive or until a person with formal CPR training can take over.

Abdominal thrusts

Giving [abdominal thrusts](#) is a method of applying pressure to remove an obstruction, like a piece of food, from a person’s windpipe. If you suspect a person is choking and/or see someone giving the universal sign of choking—holding their neck with one or both hands—immediately take the following steps:

- Ask the person if they are choking. DO NOT perform first aid if the person is coughing forcefully and is able to speak.
- If they are unable to speak, perform abdominal thrusts:
 - Stand behind the person and wrap your arms around the person’s waist. For a child, you may have to kneel.

QUICK TIPS

- Learn [how to make water contaminated with germs safe](#) to drink and where to find alternate sources of water.
- Learn how to [keep food safe](#) after a disaster or an emergency.
- Learn how to use a [fire extinguisher](#) to prepare for a home fire.

- Make a fist with one hand. Place the thumb side of your fist just above the person's navel, well below the breastbone.
- Grasp the fist tightly with your other hand.
- Make a quick, upward and inward thrust with your fist.
- Check if the object was dislodged.
- Continue thrusts until the object is dislodged or the person loses consciousness.
- Call 911 if the person loses consciousness. Always call 911 in a life-threatening emergency.

Remember, the most important practical skill that you can use in a life-threatening emergency is to call 911 and request assistance.

For more Prepare Your Health information, tips, and checklists, visit [cdc.gov/prepyourhealth](https://www.cdc.gov/prepyourhealth).